

THE CLEVELAND
MUSEUM OF ART
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**DEGAS TO MATISSE: THE MAURICE WERTHEIM COLLECTION
FROM THE HARVARD UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUMS
October 6 - December 5, 1993**

Thirty-two paintings and drawings by the French masters of Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, and early Modern art go on exhibition at The Cleveland Museum of Art on October 6, 1993, in **Degas to Matisse: The Maurice Wertheim Collection from the Harvard University Art Museums**. The special exhibition, one of the major Museum events of the fall season, remains on view until December 5, 1993.

Tickets for this show also admit visitors to the concurrent exhibition **Ansel Adams: The Early Years**. Recorded tours of both exhibitions, narrated by the Museum director, Robert P. Bergman, are available on a single audio tour. (See enclosed releases for more information about ticketing, important telephone numbers, special events, exhibition catalogues, Cafe hours, and Museum Store offerings to complement both exhibitions.)

As the title suggests, all of the works in **Degas to Matisse** came from the collection of Maurice Wertheim. In the span of fourteen years, beginning in 1936 when he was 50 years old and a successful financier and philanthropist, Wertheim assembled one of the country's most provocative and focused collections of modern French art. On his death, he bequeathed them to the Fogg Art Museum at his alma mater, Harvard University. Wertheim saw the pursuit, purchase, and loan of French art as "an act of patriotism," according to John O'Brian, who wrote the exhibition catalogue; Wertheim was expressing "support for the liberation of Europe and its culture from totalitarian domination" during the chaotic years of Depression and World War II. He deemed French civilization especially vital to the world and set about building a collection of French art with his customary "vigorous enthusiasm and determination to achieve the best," according to his daughters, Barbara Wertheim Tuchman and Anne Wertheim Werner. His taste was a match for his resolve, as this remarkable exhibition demonstrates.

One of the most dramatic pictures in the collection is Vincent van Gogh's 1888 *Self-Portrait Dedicated to Paul Gauguin* (1888). The simple, straightforward image--head and chest, in three-quarter view--radiates emotional power. The brush strokes turn in concentric circles around the head, almost like a halo, and model the face. Against a vivid green background, van Gogh's golden head appears speckled with green and violet light and highlighted by red; the whites of his eyes are not white, but green--the same green of the background--as if one looks into deep space when looking into the painter's eyes.

Another important painting in the Wertheim collection is Paul Cézanne's *Still Life with Commode* (1885), a picture of great contained force. Intensely colored apples in a dish, with a ginger pot, olive jar, and wooden chest behind them, cluster in a tightly organized composition. The still, central objects are surrounded by a twisting white form--a tablecloth that could as easily be read as a turbulent, foaming sea or a rocky mountain mass.

The Gare Saint-Lazare: Arrival of a Train (1877) is the largest of Claude Monet's series of twelve paintings of smoke- and steam-filled train stations. His celebrations of the power of the new form of transportation and of industrial architecture are, when looked at as arrangements of elements on the canvas, meditations on evanescent smoke in shifting light contrasted with the hard, unyielding shapes of the metal train and shed.

Pablo Picasso painted *Mother and Child* in 1901, when he was 20 years old. It was one the first works Wertheim bought and one of the earliest paintings of the artist's Blue Period. (The greatest monument of that period, with its sober tones and simplified forms, is *La Vie* of 1903, in the Cleveland Museum's permanent collection.) X-rays and infrared examination reveal a portrait beneath the image of the poverty-stricken and exhausted mother with her child; the unscraped paint of the hidden portrait adds extra weight and density to the surface texture of this haunting picture.

Edgar Degas's *Singer with a Glove* (1878) depicts Thérésa, the most popular café-concert performer of her day. Degas, who told a friend, "she opens her great mouth and out comes the most grossly, delicately, wittily tender voice imaginable...", focuses on Thérésa's wide mouth and double chin. Always experimenting with materials, Degas drew the main composition in dry pastel and other areas--such as the colored stripes of the background and the pink bodice of the singer's gown--with wet pigments. Where the two media meet, they bead up, creating a pleasing feathery effect.

Geraniums (1915) offers a superb example of Henri Matisse's use of color and line, which influenced so many other artists. The serpentine line of patterns in the background speaks of the Art Nouveau taste that had been popular in the years just before he made this picture. The cheerful, fresh color appears effortless, but Matisse has managed a difficult task: to make three different kinds of floral patterns--the geraniums, the flowers in the wallpaper, and those on the china dish--work well together.

Other important artists represented include Pierre Bonnard, Paul Gauguin, Edouard Manet, Camille Pissarro, Georges Seurat, and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec.

Degas to Matisse was organized by the Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge, Massachusetts. After opening at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, it traveled to the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth, Texas, and now closes its national tour at The Cleveland Museum of Art.

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